

Castaneda, Olga

From: Carol Chodroff <chodroffc@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, November 01, 2016 4:50 PM
To: Castaneda, Olga
Subject: Fwd: Comments on the role of the Probation Commission

Letter from Probation Commissioner Jo Kaplan.

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Jo Kaplan** <jok5555@aol.com>
Date: Sun, Oct 30, 2016 at 11:30 AM
Subject: Comments on the role of the Probation Commission
To: probationoversight@ceo.lacounty.gov
Cc: Carol Chodroff <chodroffc@gmail.com>, commserv@bos.lacounty.gov

As a long time member of the Los Angeles County Probation Commission, I have always had serious doubts about our limited ability to effectively perform out statutorily mandated role.

For many years now, myself and many of my fellow commissioners ,have been fully aware of the deep rooted serious problems that have plagued this department. We have observed a Los Angeles County Bureaucracy which has often appeared to be broken and dysfunctional. Furthermore, we saw a department, which, for far too long,, had lagged behind National Models of best practices in the world of Juvenile Justice.

An overview of the past history of this department (until recently) sadly reveals a government entity which has failed miserably in its legal duty to both “care for and protect” the minors under its supervision. A closer look also showed serious deficiencies in its ability to provide the critically needed rehabilitative services and programs to this population.

That being said, since approximately January 2015, there has been some notable and concrete improvements in the performance of the juvenile arm of the probation department. There has been a perceived shift in the direction the department seems to be going. In my opinion, this has been largely motivated by the change in the make up of the Board of Supervisors. A majority of this board has been willing to take a more vigilant role in the reform of this department.

We have seen the “LA Model” emerge, a collaborative effort, unprecedented in this department, are are now looking forward to our first camp setting with a trauma informed focus. We have also seen the closing of the numerous old SHU units, with their previous archaic practices. These are clearly new “lights” in what has long felt like a very dark tunnel.

However, the reality of any of these gains, and shifts in vision is that in order to ensure they are real and truly exist, there needs to be an independent body with ongoing oversight of this department.

Unfortunately, our so called “advisory role” as it now is interpreted cannot perform this function. We have been, for the most part, undermined by previous incarnations of this department. Our criticisms have often been ignored or denied, and our suggestions are often lost in a bureaucratic maze.

Quite simply, there must be a body (or bodies) which will finally be given the appropriate tools and power, and can monitor these positive changes, and determine on an ongoing basis whether this department is actually adhering to its own stated plans and policies.

It is my hope, that our probation commission will be given the power to perform this important work. We were chosen as representatives, by the Board of Supervisors because of our previous expertise and leadership roles related to this juvenile justice area.

Given an independent staff member, with a defined job description to help us implement and communicate our concerns and more tools and resources to pursue these important issues, I think we could finally be effective in our jobs. We need much better access to data and more importantly we need increased transparency with this department. Finally, we need management level leadership to understand that our role is to be respected and not to be ignored.

Our individual members have done a thorough and professional investigation of the camps and the halls for many years now. They have taken their jobs as inspectors seriously and have prepared shocking reports month after month of unsafe and unacceptable conditions in these facilities. Yet the same problems persist— revealing the importance of a continuous and vigorous county watchdog body.

The problems and deficiencies of this department are obviously not just these we find with our inspections. We continually see the need for ongoing change and improvements in many other areas. These include, but are not limited to the following:

1. Recruitment and out reach for quality staff
2. Training and retraining of staff
3. Deficiencies in provision of mental health services
4. Deficiencies in substance abuse treatment
5. Problems in grievance procedures
6. Problems in ombudsman office
7. Monitoring of new SHU directives
8. Group home procedures and compliance
9. Re-entry gaps, and bridges back to the community
10. CBO Collaboration— issues in department support
11. Unused funding streams
12. Nutritional guidelines
13. The need for implementation of the “LA Model” concepts in other camps and halls

In conclusion, admittedly many of my comments and observations are obviously the results of years of my personal frustration with this department. They are purely my own opinions and not

meant to reflect the commission's views as a whole. However, despite these past problems, I still feel hopeful when it comes to the chance for a real “SEA change” in this department in the near future. The opportunity is there and the time is NOW.

I look forward to being a part of this change, and hope our commission will be given the power to be a partner in this important endeavor.

Respectively submitted,

Jo Kaplan

Commissioner

Los Angeles County Probation Department

--